

MM Docket No. 04-233

I am writing to urge the FCC to reconsider the proposed localism requirements for radio stations, and to exempt public, non-commercial stations from these regulations. Public radio stations have a long and demonstrated history in providing quality local programming and valuable services for their communities. Although we understand the FCC's desire for radio stations to be more responsive to the needs of their communities, we find the proposals outlined in the Federal Register Notice FCC 07-218 to be burdensome, unnecessary, and in many ways contradictory to the Commission's intentions regarding localism.

WNMU-FM lives the FCC's goal of localism every day with a vibrant, interactive presence in our community. WNMU-FM, Public Radio 90 is in its 45th year of providing quality local programming to more than 40,000 listeners each week across the Upper Great Lakes region of Upper Michigan and northeastern Wisconsin. WNMU is a non-commercial educational radio station licensed to the Board of Trustees of Northern Michigan University.

WNMU-FM is controlled, staffed, and programmed locally. We produce more than 41 hours per week of specifically local programming, made and presented by and for people who live here. As a public radio service that relies on direct listener support for its operation and survival, we have an ongoing commitment to address the needs of our listening communities. Local business underwriting and direct listener support amounts to more than 60% of our operating budget. If our effectiveness as a local public radio station wanes, so does our financial support. If it thrives, typically support from the community does also. We regularly ask listeners to contact us, via on-air and online, with newsworthy topics of interest in our region. We regularly solicit listener ideas and concerns via phone, internet, mail, and at public outreach events we sponsor. WNMU, Public Radio 90 also provides daily notices of arts and public events in our listening area.

Quarterly ascertainment helps us identify weekly topics for review in the co-production of *Media Meet* produced by WNMU TV and airs on both TV and FM. *Media Meet* is a news and public affairs interview that program delves into the issues that are important to the

people of the Upper Great Lakes region. The program provides a format for more in-depth exploration of issues regularly covered on the local spot news, and features reports that are highlighted regularly within our newscasts and daily news magazine programs.

As a locally-operated station, we have the ability to serve the unique needs of our rural audience. In addition to playing the best music by nationally and internationally known artists, we regularly play recordings by local and regional musicians. Moreover, we invite local as well as visiting artists to perform live in our studios and to talk with our listeners about their work.

Many of our programs showcase regional talent including local productions like *In the Pines* featuring folk and traditional music recorded at the annual Hiawatha Traditional Music Festival now in its 29th year, *Marquette Area Blues Festival* highlights spotlighting the biggest acts from the annual Blues festival and *Superiorland Concerts*, which features classical music offerings from the Marquette Symphony Orchestra, Superior String Alliance, Keweenaw Symphony Orchestra, Marquette Choral Society, Pine Mountain Music Festival, Marquette Community concerts, and Northern Michigan University Performing Arts series.

That said, we firmly believe that decisions about what music should be played—and when and how often local artists are heard—should be entirely at the discretion of the station's programming staff. Our communities are best served when a locally owned, staffed, and programmed station such as ours, rather than the FCC, determines the appropriate mix of local, regional and national programming. Imposing mandatory minimum program origination obligations, enhanced disclosure requirements, and new license renewal processing guidelines will increase our administrative costs at a time when we are already under-resourced and increasingly stretched thin financially.

We are particularly troubled by the proposal which mandates “a physical presence” during all hours of station operation. Modern automation equipment has rendered this unnecessary during overnight and weekend periods. Requiring a physical presence in the station at all times would have the opposite effect from that intended by the Commission. At WNMU (and most other public radio stations across the country) we do

not have sufficient funding to pay people to work as board operators during these times. If this rule were to go into effect, it is very likely that WNMU would actually be forced to reduce our hours of operation or some local program productions, which is the most expensive programming to produce.

Thanks to automation, EAS alerts, Amber alerts, and weather warnings are now automatically relayed to our listeners. Those warnings would not air at all under the proposed rule. No matter what programming we currently air during automated hours, it has got to serve the listener better than no programming at all, which is what will happen if the new rules go into effect.

The proposed requirement that the main studio must be in the city of license might not affect WNMU at this point in time, but it would have serious consequences for the loyal listeners of many public radio outlets across the country that have come to depend upon essential local services provided by these stations.

The Main Studio Waivers granted to these stations have enabled public radio to serve large geographic areas in this country that could not possibly support stand-alone stations.

WNMU has recently applied for additional FM frequencies in parts of our listening area that suffer from poor or no reception. If we are awarded these frequencies we will be able to build stations and service these rural listeners **only** because we will not be required by the FCC to maintain expensive and unnecessary main studios. Under the proposed rule, WNMU would not be able to afford these new stations and those rural listeners will continue to go unserved by a public radio station.

The current rules, which make it very difficult to obtain main studio waivers, are more than sufficient to achieve the necessary balance between localism and availability of public radio in smaller communities across the country.

The proposed requirements to put public file information on the Internet, to maintain a community advisory board, and to conduct a variety of ascertainment activities are burdensome and unnecessary.

Listeners who wish to see the public file can visit our studios at any time during regular business hours to view these documents. They can also request that documents be copied and mailed to them if they are unable to physically come to the station.

I have spent nearly thirty years in radio, and not once during that time has a listener asked to see a portion of this file. The resources required to have staff members scan huge numbers of documents and the high cost of the additional bandwidth required to make them available over the Internet for such a tiny minority of interested listeners could be far better spent on covering local news or recording interviews with a local bands.

The WNMU staff is already heavily involved in our community. We work, often on a daily basis, with our local schools, chamber of commerce, city government, libraries, and community service and cultural institutions.

WNMU staff members often serve as board members or resources for these organizations. Community leaders and community members are consulted continually on a variety of issues that we face including programming, fundraising, language, and so on.

This is simply good broadcasting practice, but transforming it into an FCC mandate (along with the attendant record-keeping and bureaucratic nonsense) would put even further strain on our station's precarious budget—and again divert resources that are currently used to produce programming that is responsive to local issues and needs.

With all of the foregoing in mind, we request that the FCC withdraw the new rules that is has proposed to enable non-commercial radio stations like WNMU to continue to provide exemplary local programming to the people of our communities.

Sincerely,

Evelyn Massaro
WNMU-FM
Station Manager